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FM AMEMBASSY HARARE
TO RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE 0025
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INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 2104
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 2224
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0762
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1501
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1859
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2280
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4711
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000573

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CAIRO PLEASE PASS TO A/S FRAZER
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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/30/2018
TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC PHUM KDEM AU ZI
SUBJECT: AU ISSUES WEAK STATEMENT ON ZIM ELECTIONS

REF: HARARE 546

Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reason 1.4(d).

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) The African Union (AU) election observer mission issued its preliminary report on Zimbabwe's June 27 run-off election at a press conference on June 30. The statement says the election "fell short of accepted AU standards," but is significantly weaker than reports issued by the Pan African Parliament (PAP) and the South African Development Community (SADC) on June 28. PAP concluded that the election was not free, fair, or credible. SADC stated that the environment of politically motivated violence and intimidation impinged on the credibility of the electoral process and that the election did not reflect the will of the Zimbabwean people. Allegations that the AU observer mission head, former Sierra Leone president Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, was at State House visiting Mugabe "every day," and is a close friend of Mugabe, call the AU mission's credibility into question. END SUMMARY.

Weak AU Criticism

¶12. (U) In a briefing on June 30, Kabbah stated that the AU had deployed observers to each of Harare's 10 provinces. The relatively short preliminary report notes that: "(1) polling day was peaceful and held in accordance with the electoral laws of Zimbabwe, (2) there was violence in the run down to the elections, (3) the fear of violence deterred popular participation in the electoral process, and (4) there was no equitable access to the public media." The report concludes that the "election process fell short of accepted AU standards" and the AU is "encouraged that both parties have shown willingness to engage in constructive dialogue as a way

forward for ensuring peace, stability, and development in Zimbabwe." The final report will be sent to the AU which will then present it to the Zimbabwean government.

¶13. (U) In response to journalists' questions, Kabbah said that he "personally" did not see acts of violence. He argued that it was a "coincidence" he was present at the polling station when Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe voted on June 27. Kabbah said he was "impressed" that people had voted and that the voting day itself was "not violent."

¶14. (U) Asked to explain how the election fell "short" of election standards, as stated in the preliminary report, a Gambian observer seated next to Kabbah said that in 19 of the 20 polling places he visited, the presiding officer didn't know how many voters were registered to vote at that constituency. When pressed for additional examples, Kabbah defended the weak response, saying, "He just gave you an example." Kabbah displayed his ignorance of the electoral process when, in response to questions, indicated he did not know why MDC candidate Morgan Tsvangirai had withdrawn from the election. (NOTE: Tsvangirai's justification for pulling out -- widespread violence and unfair conditions -- was widely reported. END NOTE)

Dissension among AU observers

¶15. (C) After the report was distributed, emboff spoke

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outside with some of the younger AU observers. They reported widespread dissension among observers and said that the preliminary statement was actually stronger than what Kabbah had wanted. They also said they knew that Kabbah was "visiting his friend Mugabe" at State House every day and that they had been offered trips to Victoria Falls by the Zimbabwean government.

Weak compared to SADC and PAP statements

¶16. (C) SADC and PAP both issued their more critical statements on Sunday June 29. PAP detailed the unfairness of the electoral process, and concluded that conditions leading to the June 27 election did not give rise to free, fair, or credible elections. SADC concluded that while election day was peaceful, the prevailing environment "impinged on the credibility of the electoral process" and that "the elections did not represent the will of the people of Zimbabwe."

Precedent for AU election observations?

¶17. (C) COMMENT: In this highly publicized, contentious, and important election, it is deeply disturbing that the AU's statement, as compared to those of PAP and SADC, is superficial and barely critical. Kabbah's coziness with Mugabe, including his smiling image in the press as he watched Mugabe vote, further serve to undermine the credibility of the AU Mission and its reporting. END COMMENT.

McGee